

What are you doing with the Gospel?

Let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 2, and we are going to look at the first three verses. Paul writes, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

What are you doing with the gospel? That’s the question I want us to look at this evening. What are you doing with the gospel? We are taking these verses in Hebrews chapter 2 as our text.

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish men and women who had been converted to Christianity. They had been brought up with the religion of priests, and altars, and incense, and continual sacrifices. Judaism looked back to Moses and to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament times. There was a strong sense of ritual, a strong sense of ceremony to it all. Thousands of animals were offered, morning and evening sacrifices were presented, prayers were recited, incense was burned, priests dressed in their priestly robes, and day-in and day-out, and year-in and year-out, this routine was very carefully followed. But in the mercy of God, many of the Jews heard the message of the Gospel and were converted from Judaism to Christ.

But that posed a huge problem for those converts. The temple was still standing, the sacrifices were still ongoing. The unconverted Jews looked upon the converted Jews with grave suspicion and hatred. They didn’t understand the Gospel, or the fact that Christ, by His death, abolished all of the Old Testament sacrifice and ceremony. They didn’t understand that the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to Christ, who would offer Himself as the one sacrifice for sin. In fact, they despised Christ and they refused Him as the Messiah and the Saviour of His people.

That hatred towards Christ led to the murder, or martyrdom, of Steven in Acts 7. Steven spoke of Christ as the Son of God in heaven, and when he referenced the Saviour in those Biblical terms the Jews took him out and stoned him to death. They despised Christ, and because they despised Christ, they had little time for the Christians.

And so these new converts are facing a very challenging and difficult time. They often had to deal with the accusation that they had no altar, no priest, no sacrifice, and therefore no relationship with God. They were under intense pressure to repudiate Christ and to return to the temple and to the rituals of Judaism. These were very serious things, and as you can imagine, they posed a very serious threat. And so Paul sets out to address these matters and to encourage these new believers in the Gospel faith.

He wanted them to know more of Christ and of the salvation that they had through Him. That’s what he does at the very beginning of Hebrews chapter 1. What he does in chapter 2, and really throughout the book, is set forth to these converts the superiority of Jesus Christ. It’s very important for us to keep that in mind. The basis of the Gospel is the Person of Jesus Christ.

In the opening verses of Hebrews 1 Paul reminds his readers that Jesus Christ is God. He is “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.” He is not only the Son of God, He is God the Son. He bears the stamp of His Father’s image and He “upholds all things by the word of His power.” It has been said that the whole universe is in constant motion, from the largest star to the smallest cell. And the motion is controlled so that it fulfils the purpose of God. And then the commentator asks the question, how is it done? It is held together by the Lord Jesus Christ, who “upholds all things by the word of His power.”

The fact that Jesus Christ is God is crucial and central to the Gospel, because that guarantees the value of His work. It's something we ought to understand, that Jesus Christ is the Prophet, and the Priest, and the King that we need. He is the sole Mediator between God and man. And in that office as Mediator, Christ fulfils three functions: He is our Prophet, our Priest and our King.

-God has spoken to us through His Son, because Christ is the Prophet that we need.

-And Christ is the Priest, He has put away sin by offering Himself as the sacrifice for sins. He died a death that atones for sin. His blood has been shed for the remission of our transgressions.

-He is also our King, and as our King, he subdues our enemies and His enemies, and thus we are brought to experience the glorious victory of the Gospel.

And as our Prophet, Priest and King, Christ will bring His people safely home.

This is what the Christian message is all about. This is what sets Christianity apart from Judaism, from Buddhism, from Islam, and from every other false religion. It is the person and work of Jesus Christ. They all have their laws, and rituals and their ceremonies, but the Gospel rests on Christ, Who He is, and what He has done. That's the doctrine of the Scripture: Christ, Christ alone, and only Christ. Christ is all His fullness, Christ in all His graciousness, Christ in all His sinlessness, Christ suffering the wrath of God, satisfying the justice of God, Christ laying down His life for sinners, that sinners would have eternal life through Him, Christ leaving heaven for earth, that He might save His people and bring them from earth to heaven. Christ did not die to make salvation *possible*, Christ died to make salvation *actual*. This is Christ. And this is the Christian message. This is the message of salvation.

Do you know any of that personally in your own life, heart and soul? Do you know Christ as your Saviour? This is what Paul is outlining: God has spoken in these last days through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But Paul doesn't leave it there, because in Hebrews 2 he follows up his explanation and exposition of the person and the work of Christ by saying in verse 1, "Therefore". When you see a 'therefore' in Scripture, it throw you back into what has come before. Paul is saying, in light of who Christ is, in light of the fact that He is our Prophet, Priest and King, "therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." And then he asks, "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

Those words apply to every one of us. These words are for you and for me. If you're not saved, there's a message for you here also. So the question, "what are you doing with the Gospel?" What are you doing with the message of Christ? What are you doing with what Christ has spoken, as the Prophet, Priest and King? What are you doing with that?

With that question in mind, let us notice three things here.

1) First of all, there is a **command**. He opens by emphasizing a solemn duty, a solemn responsibility. Having outlined in Hebrews 1 the wonder of Christ, and the splendour of the Gospel, and the fact that Christ has spoken, Paul then states "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard." In other words, we are to pay more than ordinary attention to the message of Christ. That's what Paul is emphasizing. I know we have many things to think about, and pay heed to, in the course of a day, or in the course of a week. We have work commitments, school assignments for the younger people, financial matters to think about, household chores and duties, things in the family that we need to take heed to. There is a host of things throughout the day and week, and all our lives, that call for our attention. But Paul says here, "we ought to give the *more earnest* heed to the things which we have heard."

Let me just take these phrases, these words as they come. Paul says “we ought”. That little phrase comes from a Greek word that means necessity or must. It’s often translated that way in the New Testament, for example in 1 Timothy 3:2 talking about elders and bishops, Paul said ‘a bishop then *must* be blameless. That’s the same word as we have here in Hebrews 2 that is translated as ‘ought’. You can read it that way: ‘a bishop then *ought* to be blameless.’ Or you can read our text, ‘We *must* give the more earnest heed.’ It’s a very strong statement, a very emphatic word. It’s more than just good advice that Paul is giving, this is more than a suggestion or an idea, it’s a must for us! We *ought* to, we *must* do this.

Then he goes on to say “we ought to *give*.” It’s a very interesting word, give. It means to hold the mind to, or to pay attention to, to be cautious about something, to apply ourselves to something. In fact, it’s even stronger than just applying, it means to adhere to. What Paul is saying here, we must give ourselves, we must set our minds on this, we must pay close and particular attention to this matter.

And then he adds, “the more earnest heed”. What does that mean? It means more super abundantly, or exceedingly, or more frequently, or much more. So we are to pay much more attention, we are to put our minds much more to the things which we have heard of Christ. That’s what Paul is saying. If I can put it this way, what verse 1 is emphasizing, is that of all the things we have to consider in life, of all the legitimate matters and all the lawful business, of all the good things that we can give our attention to, we ought to give far more earnest attention to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That should be our priority. That should be at the very top of our list. It should be the first and foremost thing in our lives.

Both the Christian and the non-Christian are to delve into the depths of the Word of God. We are to give more careful attention to the message of the Gospel. This is what Paul is emphasizing: Therefore, in the light of Hebrews 1, in the light of Who Christ is, and what He has done, and what He is saying, we ought to give the more earnest heed to what we have heard.

So why should we do that? Apart from the fact that we are here commanded to do that, why should we do that?

Well, firstly, we should do it because of the *preciousness* of the Gospel. There’s only one Gospel. If the Gospel of Christ was not unique, if it was one of many, if there were other gospels just as sufficient and just as satisfactory, then the Gospel of Christ wouldn’t be that valuable. But there is only one Gospel. And Paul often speaks of it with the definite article, THE Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why we should give the more earnest heed to it. It’s priceless! It’s the precious Word of God, it is from One Who is all-powerful and all-glorious. This is not some common thing, it is the Gospel of God!

And secondly, because of the *Person* of the Gospel. What did Paul say in 1 Cor 15? He reminds the Corinthians of the Gospel he had preached to them: “I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” The whole emphasis of Paul’s message, the whole emphasis of the Gospel, is Christ. Christ died for our sins. Christ was buried, Christ rose from the dead. It’s all of Christ. The Gospel is not a set of principles, or some philosophy, or some strategy, or some theory. The gospel is Jesus Christ! We need to understand that. Sometimes I think there’s a tendency to define or understand the gospel in terms of a set of principles. But the Gospel is the Person of Christ. That’s why we ought to give more earnest heed to it. If we miss Christ, we miss the heart of the Christian faith.

Thirdly, we should give more earnest heed to it because of the *promise* of the Gospel. It proclaims salvation to guilty sinners! It's called in verse 3 "so great salvation". The word salvation there can also mean the message of salvation. That which conveys this glorious truth of Christ coming into the world to save sinners. It's a great salvation because it guarantees mercy to those who come unto Christ. It's a great salvation because there is forgiveness for all who will believe. It is a great salvation because it guarantees heaven for those who are in union with Christ, and are saved by Him. It's a message of hope for the hopeless, a message of cleansing for the unclean, a message of forgiveness for the guilty, a message of heaven for those who deserve hell. It's a great salvation, full of glorious promise! And that's why we should give it more earnest heed.

Fourthly, think of the *power* of the gospel. It's the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew and also to the Gentile. There is no power like the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is able to transform lives, and communities, and countries. It's able to do that which nothing else can do in this world. The Gospel is the power of God.

And fifthly, we ought to give it more earnest heed because of the *permanence* of the Gospel. It is final. Christ is the last word. It is eternal and unchangeable and everlastingly the same. Understand this, God has given us His Word, He has spoken through His Son Jesus Christ, and therefore it behooves us to take more earnest heed to it.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:12 "Unto us did they minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into." He's talking there about salvation, about the message of the Gospel, and Peter says the angels desired to look into that. What does that mean? It means the angels desire to know of it, to understand it, even though they are not partakers of it. And if the angels inquire into salvation, how much more should not we?

As believers, should we not give more earnest heed to these things? Tell me, how much do you know of Christ, who loved you and gave Himself for you? How much do you know of His person, how much do you desire to know of Him as your Prophet, Priest and King? How much do you want to know of Him as your Friend and your Advocate and your Redeemer and your Comforter? Do we want to know Him better? Do we want to lean on Him in the way of life, in the trials and troubles of life? Do we want to depend upon Him more? Then we need to give more earnest heed to these things! I fear many Christians are happy in the shallows, happy with just a very little knowledge of Christ. But we are to give more earnest heed to these things. If we understood the wonder of Christ and the wonder of His Person and His work, then what Paul writes in chapter 2 verse 1 would stand out with stark clarity in our hearts, 'therefore we will give ourselves with more earnest heed to understand these things.'

And what if you're not saved? Is it not time that you gave this matter your most earnest and utmost attention? If you don't have Christ as your Saviour, where will you be in eternity? Don't rest until you know Christ as your Saviour! So here is our command.

2) But secondly, you'll notice there is a **caution**. Why was Paul so clear on this matter of paying attention to the word of God and the gospel of Christ? Why the sense of urgency, the sense of intensity? Well, he says "therefore we ought to give more earnest heed to the things we have heard, *lest at any time we should let them slip.*" That's a very unusual phrase. It's just one word in the original Greek language, and it only appears here in the New Testament. The word slip means to glide by, or to drift. The picture that's being painted by this one word is of letting things drift away, letting them slip past. They drift from us and we drift from them. Another word is used in verse 3: "how shall escape if we *neglect* so great salvation." That means to be careless of, to make light of,

to be negligent towards, to not regard, to think little of something. It's a word that's used in Matthew 22 when the people made light of the king's wedding invitation. We're told that when they heard the invitation from the king's servants, they made light of it, they cared nothing for it, they pushed it away, they didn't lay much store upon it.

That's the grave danger that must be avoided, the danger of letting it slip past us. The danger of us just letting these things drift by. Or of making light of them. Paul comes to this theme again in Hebrew 6:11 and 12. He says "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Here's the caution that Paul is emphasizing to these believers. Don't neglect this great salvation. Don't be slothful. Don't be lazy about these great matters.

How important this caution is. Because let's be honest, there are times we do neglect to give more earnest heed to these things. There are times we do let them slip by. There are times we are negligent when it comes to our study, our comprehension, and our desire after the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's many a sinner who intends at some point to be saved, but just neglects it, let's it slip by day and after day, week after week, month after month.

Why? Why does Paul give this caution? What would lead a person to neglect so great salvation? What would lead a Christian to not give more earnest heed to these things? Let me suggest a number of things.

One of them is *pride*. The human heart is full of pride. J C Ryle said "No sin is so deeply rooted in our nature as pride. It cleaves to us like our skin." And in the proud thoughts of men and women there is the idea that we don't need God, don't need the Gospel, don't need to give diligent interest to these things. Certainly that is how it is with the ungodly in Psalm 10:4: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God." The proud person doesn't see their need to give more earnest heed to the Gospel. 'That's for others, for the careless and corrupt, for the great sinner. I don't need to think about these matters too deeply.' And so the ungodly person, out of the pride in their heart, neglects this great salvation. And sadly some Christians can fall into a similar snare. 'I don't need to delve too much into these things. I can get by without that.' Pride keeps us from the Word of God. It's pride that keeps us from prayer. It's pride that keeps us from casting our cares upon Him. It's pride that keeps us from leaning upon the Saviour, it's the thought that we can do it ourselves. That's why we're often told in Scripture to humble ourselves.

Some people neglect the gospel because of *prejudice*. Prejudice is described as pre-conceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience. Isn't that what keeps many a person from giving more earnest heed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Someone has said prejudice is a lazy man's substitute for thinking. He creates his own ideas, he picks up the ideas and notions of others, he is blinded by senseless prejudice and therefore he turns away from the gospel of Christ. That's what keeps many an unsaved person from receiving the Saviour. They listen to what others are saying, they become more and more biased and prejudiced against the Gospel, and so they reject it, and let it go. Is that where you are this morning? Prejudiced against the Gospel? Does it just wash over you?

What about *priorities*? It's a matter of desire, isn't it? A matter of putting first things first. People will earnestly seek after, and give attention to many things. But sadly, the Gospel is not often high on their list of priorities. A hymn-writer said "Room for business, room for pleasure, but for Christ the crucified, no place that he can enter, in your heart, for which he died." Room for pleasure, for sport, for politics, for whatever, but no room to give more earnest heed to the things that Christ has spoken. No room, no time, no interest, no desire, to give more time to the things of God, because our priority has been fixed on something else. Christ identifies that as the great sin of the Gentiles:

He says in Matthew 6:31-33 “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Christ is not saying that we should be absolutely careless about all those other things, that we shouldn’t care about what we wear, or what we eat, that we should take no interest in those things of life, He’s not saying that. What He is saying is, put them in their proper place, don’t over-emphasize them. But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. If I can import what Christ is saying there in Matthew 6:33 into Hebrews 2, what Christ is saying - “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” is identical to what Paul is saying, “we are to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard.” Don’t let them drift past you because your focus is on something else. Believer, don’t let that happen in your life. Don’t get so caught up with other things that you haven’t time to delve into the gospel, you haven’t time to learn more of Christ, you haven’t time to think of Him as your Saviour, what He has done for you, how to worship, serve and love Him.

Procrastination says “I’ll see to it later. I’ll do it another day, I’ll get around to it tomorrow.” But you never do. Procrastination is the thief of time. How many people intend to do something with the Gospel, but not today, and their tomorrow never comes.

For some it’s *prosperity*. God wanted the people of Israel to be warned that when they would come into the promised land there would be a danger when they would see and partake of the oliveyards, and the vineyards, and the land flowing with milk and honey, that they would forget Him. Deuteronomy 8 emphasizes that so often, when they would become settled and prosperous in the promised land, there was a danger they would forget God. It can happen. Life is good, things are going well, we are comfortable, things are easy for us. In that state of prosperity we can forget the Lord and not give more earnest heed to these things that the Lord speaks of.

Whatever the reason that is causing you to let these matters slip away, it’s not worth it! Christian, are you so taken up with other things, that you’re not giving earnest heed to the things that are most important? Is your prayer life, your love for God, your desire to do something for the Saviour, your fellowship with Him, affected? Do you ask yourself sometimes, How can I love Christ better? Have you drifted in your Christian life?

Maybe you’re not saved tonight, and you’ve allowed so many other things to come in and distract and divert you. Then you are neglecting so great salvation!

3) There is not only a command, and a caution in these verses, there is also a consequence he mentions here. I think verse 3 carries one of the most important questions in the book of Hebrews, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” Paul doesn’t specify the answer to that question. But the point that surely is being made here is that there are grave consequences for neglecting the Gospel. How shall we escape? The opposite of escape seems to suggest bondage, imprisonment, confinement, some kind of loss. If someone is in prison, they are not able to escape, they have lost their liberty. And the thought here has to be that there are consequences that happen when we do not give more earnest heed to the things that are spoken of Christ. We lose out.

There are grave consequences for the unsaved. If the unsaved person continues to neglect the Gospel, they will not escape the horrors of hell. There will be no escape from the wrath of God. No escape from the judgment, from the condemnation. In Matthew 22:7 when men made light of, and neglected the king’s invitation, we are told that the king was wroth. And those who neglect the Gospel are going to feel the wrath of the King. There’s no escape from that. My friend, if you are neglecting the Gospel, there are solemn consequences for your actions. If you don’t have Christ, you have no Saviour; and if you have no Saviour, you will stand before God in the Judgment with

your sin, under the condemnation of God on account of your sin, and you will face the wrath of God in a Christ-less hell forever. All because you've let it drift, and slip, and you've neglected it.

What of the Christian, who doesn't give earnest heed to these things, doesn't delve into them and seek to know more of them? We will lose out as well. We can't lose our salvation, but we will lose our assurance, our joy, our strength. We will lose in the excitement and exhilaration and encouragements of the Christian life, because we have held ourselves back from delving into that which is full of Christ.

This passage in Hebrews 2 is designed to help us. It's a word to encourage us to delve into the Gospel, to give ourselves to this. In the light of Who Christ is, in light of what Christ has done for us, in the light of what we have in Christ, and what He promises to us, in the light of the fullness of Jesus Christ, we ought to give ourselves more earnestly to this.

Believer, there is a fullness in the Saviour to meet our every need. Why is it sometimes we feel our needs are not being met? It is because we are not coming to Christ and experiencing and enjoying the fullness that is ours in Him. And therefore, we ought to give more earnest heed to these things. Christian, are you learning more of Christ? Are you enjoying Christ better? Do you love Christ more? Are you conscious of the greatness of His love toward you? What are you doing with the Gospel?

Unsaved person, what are you doing with the Gospel? What are you doing rejecting it, and refusing it? There is no other Saviour but Christ. So may you come to know Him as your Saviour, even

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